

Hon. Charles H. Taylor

Testimony before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands

June 12, 2002

Mr. Chairman (George Radanovich), and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to come before you today in support of HR 4530 to authorize a study of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area.

The Blue Ridge and Great Smokey Mountains of North Carolina remain the most biologically diverse temperate environments on earth, and have a rich cultural heritage. Prominent features include Mt. Mitchell, the highest mountain in the Eastern United States, America's first National Forest, the Pisgah; the Nantahala a National Forest, the Cradle of Forestry, and of course the Great Smoky Mountains Nation Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Western North Carolina also has the richest culture in the Southeast. Famous for its distinct style in weaving, pottery, jewelry, woodwork, and music, the mountainous region of North Carolina is a melting pot of different cultures. Craftspeople in the area account for a large portion of the economy. The Biltmore House, Johnson Farm, and the Cherokee Reservation are just a few of the places that preserve the history of the area. Our literary legacy is rich too, with the long time home of our national Poet Laureate, Carl Sandburg at Connemara in Henderson County, and of course, Asheville, the home of Thomas Wolf and O'Henry.

Preservation, development, and enhancement of these biological and cultural features are important, and worthy of designation under the National Heritage Area Program. Handmade in America and Advantage West worked together to develop the proposed Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. It's my hope that the Committee and the National Park Service will forward rapidly with not only the study called for in HR 4530, but also the actual designation of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area.

Ms. Becky Anderson, is Executive Director of HandMade in America. She has 30 years experience in economic and community development in Western North Carolina serving as Director of Economic Development for the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, the Director of Asheville's Downtown Development Office and Director of Community Development for Land of Sky Regional Council.

Betty Huskins has worked to improve the quality of life in communities throughout the mountains of North Carolina through sustainable economic development. As Vice President - Public Affairs & Corporate Development for AdvantageWest, a regional public/private economic development partnership, her work includes marketing and growing tourism in the region, much of which has focused on the region's rich cultural heritage.

Mr. Chairman, I thank the Committee for hearing this bill and these witnesses.

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